

MODULE 1

High-Quality Child Care: Why it Matters and How We Achieve It



The Case for Quality

From birth through age three, the human brain produces more than a million neural connections each second. These connections build a foundation upon which the human brain functions throughout life. This foundation supports emotional and physical health, social skills, and learning and language skills which are critical to success in later life, including in the workplace. While there are many variables which contribute to the development of these neural connections, **one of the most important is responsive, quality caregiving - interaction between children and their parents, other caregivers, and community.** This quality caregiving can happen in center-based child care, after school programs, and/or certified or licensed family child care homes.

Wisconsin's young children represent the future of our state and workforce. Ensuring the approximately 300,000 Wisconsin children ages six and under who regularly engage with caregivers outside of their home¹ have a strong foundation for their future should be a strong focus of Wisconsin employers and the parents they employ.

What does it take to make a child care program a quality program?

- Professional and stable teacher workforce and effective leadership
- Age and developmentally appropriate materials, curriculum and environment
- Family engagement
- Continuous quality improvement
- Sustainable and sufficient funding

In This Module

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- What does it take to make a child care program a quality program? – 1
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Tool Kit Modules

- **Module 1 – High-Quality Child Care: Why It Matters and How We Achieve It**
- Module 2 – Building Successful Business-Child Care Partnerships
- Module 3 – Best Business Practices for Child Care
- Module 4 – Moving Forward: Rules and Regulations for Opening or Expanding a Child Care Site
- Module 5 – Sustaining Child Care in My Community
- Module 6 – Why Should Businesses Partner with Child Care?

Tool kit modules will be released on a rolling basis. For a full list, visit www.ProjectGrowth.WI.gov.

¹<https://cdn.americanprogress.org/content/uploads/2019/09/12072632/Wisconsin.pdf>





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“High-quality early childhood programs can yield a \$4-9 return per \$1 invested.”²

Studies have shown the significant and lasting impacts of quality child care; “children enrolled in high-quality early learning programs are:

- Less likely to need special education services during their K-12 years;
- Less likely to commit juvenile offenses; and
- More likely to graduate from high school.

In the long term, those participating children are more likely to be employed and less likely to be dependent on government assistance.³

In addition to families and employers, “(o)ther beneficiaries from...high-quality (child)care programs may include state and local government...taxpayers and society at large. Because high-quality early childhood programs promote healthy development, they can generate savings by obviating the need for more expensive interventions later in a child’s life” (see examples above).²

Read

- [Importance of Quality Early Care](#) from First 5 LA
- [Workforce of Today, Workforce of Tomorrow: The Business Case for High-Quality Childcare](#), a 2017 report from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce ([video of accompanying event](#) with national business leaders)

Watch

- [The Science of Early Brain Development](#) from the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University
- [How every child can thrive by five](#); a TED talk by 7-year-old Molly Wright highlighting the importance of meaningful connection and relationships
- [Why is Quality Child Care So Important?](#) from Child Care Aware of America

Do

- The [Brain Architecture Game](#) is a unique way to learn about the importance of relationships in early brain development. It can be used as a team-building activity optimized for a 75-90 minute experience for teams of 4-6, and is now available in a virtual format.

²<https://www.impact.upenn.edu/early-childhood-toolkit/why-invest/what-is-the-return-on-investment>

³<https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/early-childhood/reports/2017/02/13/414939/quality-101-identifying-the-core-components-of-a-high-quality-early-childhood-program>



Quality care requires a quality workforce

High expectations are placed on our child care workforce, including (but not limited to) educational requirements, ongoing training, and the ability to provide a safe, stable, and enriching educational experience for very young children on a daily basis. Providing an environment in which responsive, quality caregiving is standard requires more than just an employee. It requires “caregivers who understand how to respond to individual social and emotional needs and are trained in facilitating the play and exploration that are the basis for baby learning. A child care center or family child care home should be a place where a nurturing staff provides an environment rich in language and activities guided by the young child’s own agenda for discovery.”⁴ What’s more, when a caregiver feels supported in his or her role (compensation, work supports, benefits, paid time off, etc.), they are more apt to sustain responsive and nurturing care environments.

But the child care workforce is one of most poorly compensated in the United States; the “Wisconsin Early Care and Education Workforce Study”⁵ prepared by the Institute for Research on Poverty (IRP) at the University of Wisconsin-Madison for the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families (DCF) found:

- Median hourly wages ranged from \$11.00 for assistant teachers to \$13.55 for lead teachers;
- Only one in five teachers had health coverage through their ECE job;
- Half had access to paid sick leave;
- Three-quarters reported having paid holidays; and
- More than one in four reported looking for a new job in the past six months; 28% plan to leave the ECE field within the next two years and 50% plan to leave within the next five years, citing the desire to seek higher wages, more benefits, and more opportunity for advancement.

The compensation received by the child care workforce should match the requirements and expectations placed on them. Investment in our child care workforce is one of the most important things that can be done to support Wisconsin’s children and our current and future Wisconsin workforce.

The typical family provider is caring for five children in their home and doing that work 60 hours each week to generate a net monthly income of \$1,790. The implied wage rate of this family provider is just \$7.46 per hour. This barely clears the state’s minimum wage of \$7.25.

“The workforce is the most critical component of quality in an early childhood program. All teachers need to have a foundational knowledge of child development and be able to lead activities that promote children’s learning at various ages. This important role requires that teachers have formal education and training in early childhood education.”⁶

⁴<https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/1492-high-quality-childcare-a-critical-ingredient-for-nurturing-success>

⁵<https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/files/childcare/pdf/pdg/wi-ece-workforce-teacher-report.pdf>

⁶<https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/early-childhood/reports/2017/02/13/414939/quality-101-identifying-the-core-components-of-a-high-quality-early-childhood-program>



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Read

- [Compensation Matters Most](#) from the National Association for the Education of Young Children
- [Increased Compensation for Early Educators: It's Not Just "Nice to Have" - It's a Must-Have](#) from the Center on the Study of Child Care Employment at the University of California, Berkeley
- [Child Care Workforce](#) from the Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families
- [Training for staff in early childhood education and care must promote practices that foster children's learning, development and well-being](#) from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)
- [Wisconsin's Early Care and Education Workforce at a Glance](#) from DCF, IRP, WECA, UW-Madison Survey Center, and COWS

Watch

- [Effective Teacher-Child Interactions](#) from Touchstone
- [Empowering Preschool Quality videos](#) from the University of Northern Iowa, showcasing a variety of quality interactions between teachers and children. Notes are provided which detail how the activities align with quality standards.

Do

- Explore resources in the Department of Children and Families' [PDG Sandbox](#), including [data for your county](#) on child care affordability, accessibility, quality, and the workforce.



How is quality assessed?

In 2010, Wisconsin implemented YoungStar, a five-star quality rating system for child care providers based on education, learning environment, business methods, and practices around child health and well-being. This rating system:

- Objectively measures child care quality, awarding up to five stars for the quality of care;
- Gives parents an easy way to assess their child care options and find the programs that match their family's lifestyle, budget, and special needs;
- Supports providers with tools and training to deliver high-quality care; and
- Sets a consistent standard for child care quality

Participation in YoungStar is free for child care providers, and they are provided access to technical assistance, training, coaching, and other resources to improve the quality of their child care program. YoungStar rates a provider around four key categories:

- Providers' education and training
- Learning environment and curriculum
- Business and professional practices
- Children's health and well-being

Funding for YoungStar comes from the Child Care Development Fund (CCDF) from the federal government, which designates percentages of CCDF funding that must be set aside for use on specific topics such as quality improvement; the current set-aside for quality improvement is nine percent. The Wisconsin Department of Children and Families is the lead agency for CCDF in Wisconsin.

In addition to YoungStar, the Wisconsin Early Childhood Collaborating Partners have developed the Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards (WMELS). Based on research and supported by evidence-based practices, WMELS specifies developmental expectations for children from birth through the entrance to first grade and provides a framework for families, professionals, & policy makers to:

- Share a common language and responsibility for the well-being of children from birth to first grade;
- Know and understand developmental expectations of young children; and
- Understand the connection between the foundations of early childhood, K-12 educational experiences, and lifelong learning.



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Read

- [Reading the Stars](#), an informational flyer about YoungStar's child care quality ratings
- [YoungStar Rating Criteria](#), resources to understand what is taken into consideration when a child care program is rated
- [Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards Frequently Asked Questions](#)

Watch

- [What is YoungStar?](#) This provides background information on Wisconsin's Quality Rating and Improvement System.
- [Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards](#) specify developmental expectations for children from birth through the entrance to first grade. The standards reflect the domains of a child's learning & development. The domains include: Health & Physical Development; Social & Emotional Development; Language Development & Communication; and Approaches to Learning: Cognition & General Knowledge.

Do

- [Explore the YoungStar website](#) to learn more about the program and its impact. You can even look up participating programs in your community!



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